

COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

TOPIC OVERVIEW

An estimated half of the world's population lacks access to essential services. Barriers such as economic constraints, geographic isolation, financial constraints and a shortage of health care workers are often at the root of this disparity. Community health workers (CHWs) offer a vital solution to bridge this gap.

Community health workers extend the reach of primary health care (PHC) by delivering a comprehensive set of PHC services, including preventive and curative care and health education in homes, community institutions, and peripheral health posts.

Community health worker program models vary depending on local needs, which can influence the training, supervision, place of service, remuneration, and service package offered. While evidence from programs at national scale is varied, there is growing global consensus that community health worker programs are making significant contributions to improving health outcomes.

Exemplars in Global Health CHW Research

The CHW research was one of the foundational studies for the Exemplars in Global Health (EGH) program. Four countries were studied -- Brazil, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Liberia -- selected on the basis of performance on increased health service coverage and reduced mortality rates relative to CHW program scale, while aiming for diversity across geography, disease burden, and income levels.

- **Brazil's** CHW program, one of the largest in the world, has achieved remarkable success in reducing under-five mortality by 75%, and maternal mortality by nearly 60%, while ensuring near-universal immunization. The Programa Saúde da Família has provided primary care to over 100 million people, resulting in a 60% reduction in infant mortality and a 38% decrease in cardiovascular mortality. Designed to address key limitations in Brazil's health system, including fragmentation and inequities in access, the program emphasizes decentralization, performance-based funding, and outreach to underserved populations. CHWs play a vital role in connecting many Brazilians to primary health care, significantly improving health and social indicators by integrating them into comprehensive primary health teams. This multisectoral approach effectively addresses health inequities and strengthens preventive and curative care across the country.

- **Bangladesh's** CHW programs have achieved remarkable success, contributing to a 60% reduction in maternal mortality and a 75% drop in under-five mortality since 1990. CHWs played a key role in scaling up immunization coverage to over 80% and controlling diseases like tuberculosis. Key strategies include extensive partnerships with NGOs, strong government commitment, and a focus on addressing gender disparities in health care. Bangladesh's program is distinguished by its focus on empowering women, proactive outreach, and data-driven decision-making.
- **Ethiopia's** Health Extension Program (HEP) has been a model for delivering healthcare to rural populations, with over 42,000 Health Extension Workers (HEWs) providing essential services. The program contributed to a 67% reduction in child mortality and a 50% decrease in maternal mortality since 2000. Key factors behind its success include strong political leadership, coordinated donor support, an extended pilot phase, and a commitment to continuous monitoring and adaptation, which allowed the program to evolve and scale effectively.
- **Liberia** serves as an exemplar in community health worker (CHW) programs, demonstrating significant improvements in health outcomes through its innovative approach post-Ebola crisis. The country has established a robust CHW framework, integrating them into the healthcare system to enhance access to primary care, especially in remote areas. Key insights include the successful training and deployment of CHWs, who have played crucial roles in promoting health education, facilitating vaccinations, and addressing maternal and child health needs. This model emphasizes community engagement, collaboration between health sectors, and the use of data to inform decision-making, ultimately leading to improved health indicators and a more resilient health system. Liberia's experience illustrates the importance of investing in CHWs to address healthcare gaps, enhance service delivery, and empower communities in the face of public health challenges.

Research partners

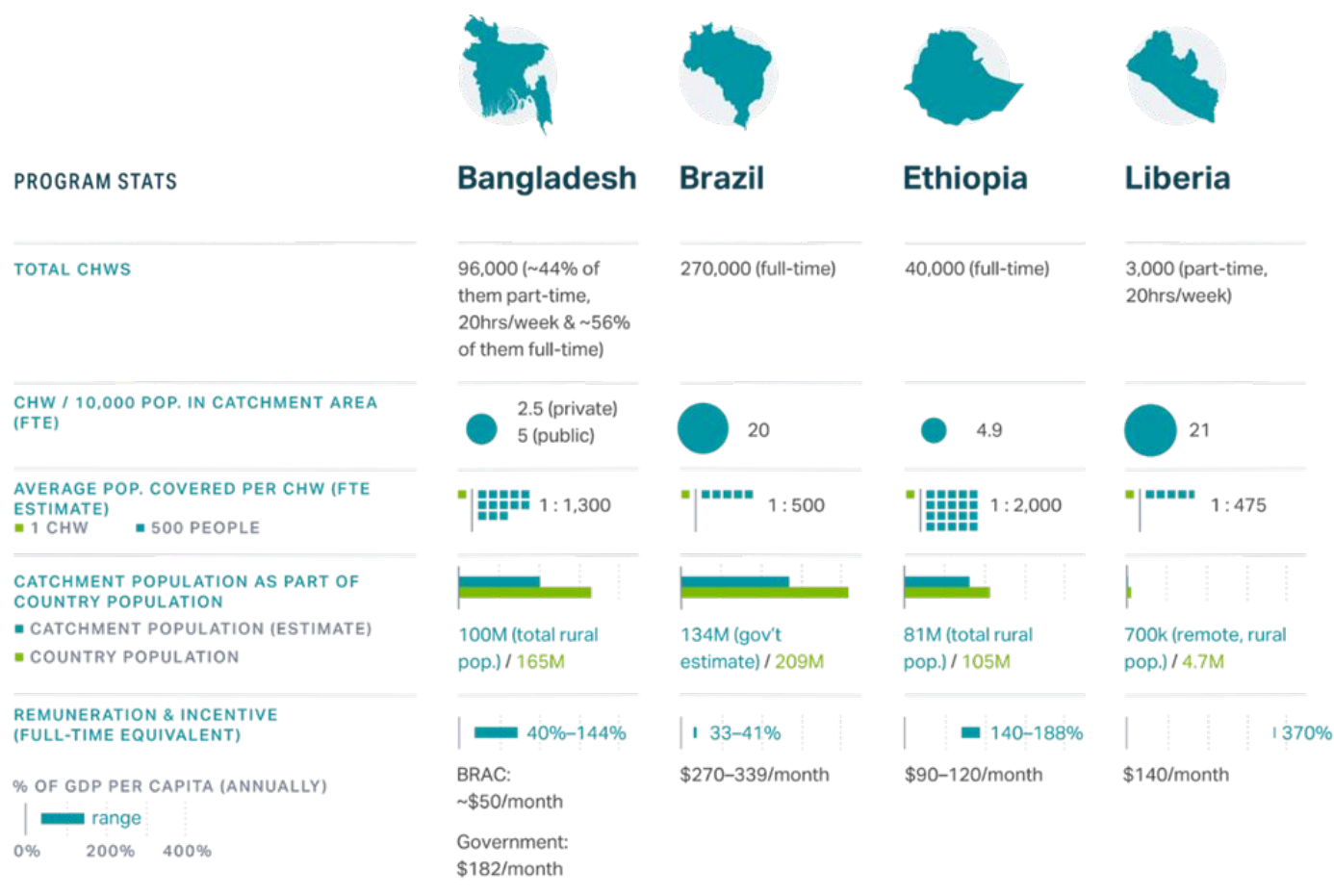
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Additional EGH CHW Research

CHW RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI) STUDY

Exemplars EGH conducted additional research on four sub-national programs in Kenya and Uganda to analyze the programmatic and contextual factors that shape the return on investment of community health worker (CHW) CHW programs in routine settings. Ultimately, findings uncovered CHW programs may not be meeting their full potential. The highest performing program achieved 10 times the results compared to the lowest performing program. This highlights a significant opportunity to realize more value from CHW programs. Findings also reinforce that CHW programs can tweak the system design to realize more value. In general, timely CHW compensation was associated with higher performing programs. One CHW program improved the design of its compensation system, along with tweaks to supervision, and target-setting processes, and improved its results by a factor of five. This led to fewer stockouts and more services delivered. See more [here](#).

Research partners



Dalberg

CHW SIERRA LEONE

Currently, Exemplars EGH is partnering with the Government in Sierra Leone and in-country partners (Last Mile Health, and FOCUS 1000) to examine and optimize the rollout of a new cadre of CHWs as a priority initiative for the Ministry of Health and Sanitation. The study examined CHW performance through the lens of recruitment and training (and quality of training) and CHW readiness to provide services, to provide information and a roadmap for the government to improve the program. Early findings showed a need to improve the strategy for recruitment, support ongoing training of workers to ensure knowledge and skills, review the service delivery demands placed on CHWs, and reconsider the model of community health in urban settings. In districts throughout Sierra Leone, research findings were used to inform district action plans aimed to strengthen the performance of the CHW program. Full findings will be coming soon to www.exemplars.health.

Research partners

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